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THE INFERIORITY COMPLEX OF OLD SLIPPY

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BERTIE WOOSTER

SHORT STORY COLLECTION

The Inferiority Complex of Old Sippy

The Inferiority Complex of Old Sippy

I checked the man with one of my glances. I was astounded and shocked.

"Not another word, Jeeves," I said. "You have gone too far. Hats, yes. Socks, yes. Coats, trousers, shirts, ties, and spats, absolutely. On all these things I defer to your judgment. But when it comes to vases, no."

"Very good, sir."

"You say that this vase is not in harmony with the appointments of the room—whatever that means, if anything. I deny this, Jeeves, in toto. I like this vase. I call it decorative, striking, and, all in all, an exceedingly good fifteen bob's worth."

"Very good, sir."

"That's that, then. If anybody rings up, I shall be closeted during the next hour with Mr. Sipperley at the offices of *The Mayfair Gazette*."

I beetled off with a fairish amount of restrained hauteur, for I was displeased with the man. On the previous afternoon, while sauntering along the Strand, I had found myself wedged into one of those sort of alcove places where fellows with voices like foghorns stand all day selling things by auction. And, though I was still vague as to how exactly it had happened, I had somehow become the possessor of a large china vase with crimson dragons on it. And not only dragons, but birds, dogs, snakes, and a thing that looked like a leopard. This menagerie was now stationed on a bracket over the door of my sitting-room.

I liked the thing. It was bright and cheerful. It caught the eye. And that was why, when Jeeves, wincing a bit, had weighed in with some perfectly gratuitous art-criticism, I ticked him off with no little vim. *Ne sutor ultra* whatever-it-is, I would have said to him, if I'd thought of it. I mean to say, where does a valet get off, censoring vases? Does it fall within his province to knock the young master's chinaware? Absolutely not, and so I told him.

I was still pretty heartily hipped when I reached the office of *The Mayfair Gazette*, and it would have been a relief to my feelings to have decanted my troubles on to old Sippy, who, being a very, very dear old pal of mine, would no doubt have understood and sympathized. But when the office-boy had slipped me through into the inner cubbyhole where the old lad performed his editorial duties, he seemed so preoccupied that I hadn't the heart.

All these editor blokes, I understand, get pretty careworn after they've been at the job for awhile. Six months before, Sippy had been a cheery cove, full of happy laughter; but at that time he was what they call a freelance, bunging in a short story here and a set of verses there and generally enjoying himself. Ever since he had become editor of this rag, I had sensed a change, so to speak.

Today he looked more editorial then ever; so, shelving my own worries for the nonce, I endeavoured to cheer him up by telling him how much I had enjoyed his last issue. As a matter of fact, I hadn't read it, but we Woosters do not shrink from subterfuge when it is a question of bracing up a buddy.

The treatment was effective. He showed animation and verve.

"You really liked it?"

"Red-hot, old thing."

"Full of good stuff, eh?"

"Packed."

"That poem—'Solitude'?"

"What a gem!"

"A genuine masterpiece."

"Pure tabasco. Who wrote it?"

"It was signed," said Sippy, a little coldly.

"I keep forgetting names."

"It was written," said Sippy, "by Miss Gwendolen Moon. Have you ever met Miss Moon, Bertie?"

"Not to my knowledge. Nice girl?"

"My God!" said Sippy.

I looked at him keenly. If you ask my Aunt Agatha, she will tell you—in fact, she is quite likely to tell you even if you don't ask her—that I am a vapid and irreflective chump. Barely sentient, was the way she once described me: and I'm not saying that in a broad, general sense she isn't right. But there is one department of life in which I am old Lynx-Eye in person. I can recognize Love's Young Dream more quickly than any other bloke of my weight and age in the Metropolis. So many of my pals have copped it in the past few years that now I can spot it a mile off on a foggy day. Sippy was leaning back in his chair, chewing a piece of

indiarubber, with a far-off look in his eyes, and I formed my diagnosis instantly.

"Tell me all, laddie," I said.

"Bertie, I love her."

"Stout fellow! Have you told her so?"

"How can I?"

"I don't see why not. Quite easy to bring into the general conversation."

Sippy groaned hollowly.

"Do you know what it is, Bertie, to feel the humility of a worm?"

"Rather! I do sometimes with Jeeves. But today he went too far. You will scarcely credit it, old man, but he had the crust to criticize a vase which—"

"She is so far above me."

"Tall girl?"

"Spiritually. She is all soul. And what am I? Earthy."

"Would you say that?"

"I would. Have you forgotten that a year ago I did thirty days without the option for punching a policeman in the stomach on Boat-Race night?"

"But you were whiffled at the time."

"Exactly. What right has an inebriated jailbird to aspire to a goddess?"

My heart bled for the poor old chap.

"Aren't you exaggerating things a trifle, old lad?" I said. "Everybody who has had a gentle upbringing gets a bit sozzled on Boat-Race night, and the better element nearly always have trouble with the gendarmes."

He shook his head.

"It's no good, Bertie. You mean well, but words are useless. No, I can but worship from afar. When I am in her presence a strange dumbness comes over me. My tongue seems to get entangled with my tonsils. I could no more muster up the nerve to propose to her than—Come in!" he shouted.

For, just as he was beginning to go nicely and display a bit of eloquence, a knock had sounded on the door. In fact, not so much a knock as a bang—or even a slosh. And there now entered a large, important-looking bird with penetrating eyes, a Roman nose, and high cheekbones. Authoritative. That's the word I want. I didn't like his collar, and Jeeves would have had a thing or two to say about the sit of his trousers; but, nevertheless, he was authoritative. There was something compelling about the man. He looked like a traffic-policeman.

"Ah, Sipperley!" he said.

Old Sippy displayed a good deal of agitation. He had leaped from his chair, and was now standing in

a constrained attitude, with a sort of pop-eyed expression on his face.

"Pray be seated, Sipperley," said the cove. He took no notice of me. After one keen glance and a brief waggle of the nose in my direction, he had washed Bertram out of his life. "I have brought you another little offering—ha! Look it over at your leisure, my dear fellow."

"Yes, sir," said Sippy.

"I think you will enjoy it. But there is just one thing. I should be glad, Sipperley, if you would give it a leetle better display, a rather more prominent position in the paper than you accorded to my 'Landmarks of Old Tuscany.' I am quite aware that in a weekly journal space is a desideratum, but one does not like one's efforts to be—I can only say pushed away in a back corner among advertisements of bespoke tailors and places of amusement." He paused, and a nasty gleam came into his eyes. "You will bear this in mind, Sipperley?"

"Yes, sir," said Sippy.

"I am greatly obliged, my dear fellow," said the cove, becoming genial again. "You must forgive my mentioning it. I would be the last person to attempt to dictate the—ha!—editorial policy, but—Well, good

afternoon, Sipperley. I will call for your decision at three o'clock tomorrow."

He withdrew, leaving a gap in the atmosphere about ten feet by six. When this had closed in, I sat up.

"What was that?" I said.

I was startled to observe poor old Sippy apparently go off his onion. He raised his hands over his head, clutched his hair, wrenched it about for a while, kicked a table with great violence, and then flung himself into his chair.

"Curse him!" said Sippy. "May he tread on a banana-skin on his way to chapel and sprain both ankles!"

"Who was he?"

"May he get frog-in-the-throat and be unable to deliver the end-of-term sermon!"

"Yes, but who was he?"

"My old head master, Bertie," said Sippy.

"Yes, but, my dear old soul—"

"Head master of my old school." He gazed at me in a distraught sort of way. "Good Lord! Can't you understand the position?"

"Not by a jugful, laddie."

Sippy sprang from his chair and took a turn or two up and down the carpet.

"How do you feel," he said, "when you meet the head master of your old school?"

"I never do. He's dead."

"Well, I'll tell you how I feel. I feel as if I were in the Lower Fourth again, and had been sent up by my form-master for creating a disturbance in school. That happened once, Bertie, and the memory still lingers. I can recall as if it were yesterday knocking at old Waterbury's door and hearing him say, 'Come in!' like a lion roaring at an early Christian, and going in and shuffling my feet on the mat and him looking at me and me explaining—and then, after what seemed a lifetime, bending over and receiving six of the juiciest on the old spot with a cane that bit like an adder. And whenever he comes into my office now the old wound begins to trouble me, and I just say, 'Yes, sir,' and 'No, sir,' and feel like a kid of fourteen."

I began to grasp the posish. The whole trouble with these fellows like Sippy, who go in for writing, is that they develop the artistic temperament, and you never know when it is going to break out.

"He comes in here with his pockets full of articles on 'The Old School Cloisters' and 'Some Little-Known Aspects of Tacitus,' and muck like that, and I haven't the nerve to refuse them. And this is

supposed to be a paper devoted to the lighter interests of Society."

"You must be firm, Sippy. Firm, old thing."

"How can I, when the sight of him makes me feel like a piece of chewed blotting-paper? When he looks at me over that nose, my morale goes blue at the roots and I am back at school again. It's persecution, Bertie. And the next thing that'll happen is that my proprietor will spot one of those articles, assume with perfect justice that, if I can print that sort of thing, I must be going off my chump, and fire me."

I pondered. It was a tough problem.

"How would it be—?" I said.

"That's no good."

"Only a suggestion, laddie," I said.

"Jeeves," I said, when I got home, "surge round!"

"Sir?"

"Burnish the old bean. I have a case that calls for one of your best efforts. Have you ever heard of a Miss Gwendolen Moon?"

"Authoress of 'Autumn Leaves,' ' 'Twas on an English June,' and other works. Yes, sir."

"Great Scott, Jeeves, you seem to know everything."

"Thank you very much, sir."

"Well, Mr. Sipperley is in love with Miss Moon."

"Yes, sir."

"But fears to speak."

"It is often the way, sir."

"Deeming himself unworthy."

"Precisely, sir."

"Right! But that is not all. Tuck that away in a corner of the mind, Jeeves, and absorb the rest of the facts. Mr. Sipperley, as you are aware, is the editor of a weekly paper devoted to the interests of the lighter Society. And now the head master of his old school has started calling at the office and unloading on him junk entirely unsuited to the lighter Society. All clear?"

"I follow you perfectly, sir."

"And this drip Mr. Sipperley is compelled to publish, much against his own wishes, purely because he lacks the nerve to tell the man to go to blazes. The whole trouble being, Jeeves, that he has got one of those things that fellows do get—it's on the tip of my tongue."

"An inferiority complex, sir?"

"Exactly. An inferiority complex. I have one myself with regard to my Aunt Agatha. You know me, Jeeves. You know that if it were a question of volunteers to man the lifeboat, I would spring to the task. If anyone said, 'Don't go down the coal-mine,

daddy,' it would have not the slightest effect on my resolution—"

"Undoubtedly, sir."

"And yet—and this is where I want you to follow me very closely, Jeeves—when I hear that my Aunt Agatha is out with her hatchet and moving in my direction, I run like a rabbit. Why? Because she gives me an inferiority complex. And so it is with Mr. Sipperley. He would, if called upon, mount the deadly breach, and do it without a tremor; but he cannot bring himself to propose to Miss Moon, and he cannot kick his old head master in the stomach and tell him to take his beastly essays on 'The Old School Cloisters' elsewhere, because he has an inferiority complex. So what about it, Jeeves?"

"I fear I have no plan which I could advance with any confidence on the spur of the moment, sir."

"You want time to think, eh?"

"Yes, sir."

"Take it, Jeeves, take it. You may feel brainier after a night's sleep. What is it Shakespeare calls sleep, Jeeves?"

"Tired Nature's sweet restorer, sir."

"Exactly. Well, there you are, then."

You know, there's nothing like sleeping on a thing. Scarcely had I woken up next morning when I

discovered that, while I slept, I had got the whole binge neatly into order and worked out a plan Foch might have been proud of. I rang the bell for Jeeves to bring me my tea.

I rang again. But it must have been five minutes before the man showed up with the steaming.

"I beg your pardon, sir," he said, when I reproached him. "I did not hear the bell. I was in the sitting-room, sir."

"Ah?" I said, sucking down a spot of the mixture. "Doing this and that, no doubt?"

"Dusting your new vase, sir."

My heart warmed to the fellow. If there's one person I like, it's the chap who is not too proud to admit it when he's in the wrong. No actual statement to that effect had passed his lips, of course, but we Woosters can read between the lines. I could see that he was learning to love the vase.

"How does it look?"

"Yes, sir."

A bit cryptic, but I let it go.

"Jeeves," I said.

"Sir?"

"That matter we were in conference about yestereen."

"The matter of Mr. Sipperley, sir?"

"Precisely. Don't worry yourself any further. Stop the brain working. I shall not require your services. I have found the solution. It came on me like a flash."

"Indeed, sir?"

"Just like a flash. In a matter of this kind, Jeeves, the first thing to do is to study—what's the word I want?"

"I could not say, sir."

"Quite a common word—though long."

"Psychology, sir?"

"The exact noun. It is a noun?"

"Yes, sir."

"Spoken like a man! Well, Jeeves, direct your attention to the psychology of old Sippy. Mr. Sipperley, if you follow me, is in the position of a man from whose eyes the scales have not fallen. The task that faced me, Jeeves, was to discover some scheme which would cause those scales to fall. You get me?"

"Not entirely, sir."

"Well, what I'm driving at is this. At present this head master bloke, this Waterbury, is trampling all over Mr. Sipperley because he is hedged about with dignity, if you understand what I mean. Years have passed; Mr. Sipperley now shaves daily and is in an important editorial position; but he can never forget

that this bird once gave him six of the juiciest. Result: an inferiority complex. The only way to remove that complex, Jeeves, is to arrange that Mr. Sipperley shall see this Waterbury in a thoroughly undignified position. This done, the scales will fall from his eyes. You must see that for yourself, Jeeves. Take your own case. No doubt there are a number of your friends and relations who look up to you and respect you greatly. But suppose one night they were to see you, in an advanced state of intoxication, dancing the Charleston in your underwear in the middle of Piccadilly Circus?"

"The contingency is remote, sir."

"Ah, but suppose they did. The scales would fall from their eyes, what?"

"Very possibly, sir."

"Take another case. Do you remember a year or so ago the occasion when my Aunt Agatha accused the maid at that French hotel of pinching her pearls, only to discover that they were still in her drawer?"

"Yes, sir."

"Whereupon she looked the most priceless ass. You'll admit that."

"Certainly I have seen Mrs. Spenser appear to greater advantage than at that moment, sir."

"Exactly. Now follow me like a leopard. Observing my Aunt Agatha in her downfall; watching her turn bright mauve and listening to her being told off in liquid French by a whiskered hotel proprietor without coming back with so much as a single lift of the eyebrows, I felt as if the scales had fallen from my eyes. For the first time in my life, Jeeves, the awe with which this woman had inspired me from childhood's days left me. It came back later, I'll admit; but at the moment I saw my Aunt Agatha for what she was—not, as I had long imagined, a sort of man-eating fish at the very mention of whose name strong men quivered like aspens, but a poor goop who had just dropped a very serious brick. At that moment, Jeeves, I could have told her precisely where she got off; and only a too chivalrous regard for the sex kept me from doing so. You won't dispute that?"

"No, sir."

"Well, then, my firm conviction is that the scales will fall from Mr. Sipperley's eyes when he sees this Waterbury, this old head master, stagger into his office covered from head to foot with flour."

"Flour, sir?"

"Flour, Jeeves."

"But why should he pursue such a course, sir?"

"Because he won't be able to help it. The stuff will be balanced on top of the door, and the force of gravity will do the rest. I propose to set a booby-trap for this Waterbury, Jeeves."

"Really, sir, I would scarcely advocate—"

I raised my hand.

"Peace, Jeeves! There is more to come. You have not forgotten that Mr. Sipperley loves Miss Gwendolen Moon, but fears to speak. I bet you'd forgotten that."

"No, sir."

"Well, then, my belief is that, once he finds he has lost his awe of this Waterbury, he will be so supremely braced that there will be no holding him. He will rush right off and bung his heart at her feet, Jeeves."

"Well, sir—"

"Jeeves," I said, a little severely, "whenever I suggest a plan or scheme or course of action, you are too apt to say 'Well, sir,' in a nasty tone of voice. I do not like it, and it is a habit you should check. The plan or scheme or course of action which I have outlined contains no flaw. If it does, I should like to hear it."

"Well, sir—"

"Jeeves!"

"I beg your pardon, sir. I was about to remark that, in my opinion, you are approaching Mr. Sipperley's problems in the wrong order."

"How do you mean, the wrong order?"

"Well, I fancy, sir, that better results would be obtained by first inducing Mr. Sipperley to offer marriage to Miss Moon. In the event of the young lady proving agreeable, I think that Mr. Sipperley would be in such an elevated frame of mind that he would have no difficulty in asserting himself with Mr. Waterbury."

"Ah, but you are then stymied by the question—How is he to be induced?"

"It had occurred to me, sir, that, as Miss Moon is a poetess and of a romantic nature, it might have weight with her if she heard that Mr. Sipperley had met with a serious injury and was mentioning her name."

"Calling for her brokenly, you mean?"

"Calling for her, as you say, sir, brokenly."

I sat up in bed, and pointed at him rather coldly with the teaspoon.

"Jeeves," I said, "I would be the last man to accuse you of dithering, but this is not like you. It is not the old form, Jeeves. You are losing your grip. It might be years before Mr. Sipperley had a serious injury."

"There is that to be considered, sir."

"I cannot believe that it is you, Jeeves, who are meekly suggesting that we should suspend all activities in this matter year after year, on the chance that some day Mr. Sipperley may fall under a truck or something. No! The programme will be as I have sketched it out, Jeeves. After breakfast, kindly step out and purchase about a pound and a half of the best flour. The rest you may leave to me."

"Very good, sir."

The first thing you need in matters of this kind, as every general knows, is a thorough knowledge of the terrain. Not know the terrain, and where are you? Look at Napoleon and that sunken road at Waterloo. Silly ass!

I had a thorough knowledge of the terrain of Sippy's office, and it ran as follows. I won't draw a plan, because my experience is that, when you're reading one of those detective stories and come to the bit where the author draws a plan of the Manor, showing room where body was found, stairs leading to passageway, and all the rest of it, one just skips. I'll simply explain in a few brief words.

The offices of *The Mayfair Gazette* were on the first floor of a mouldy old building off Covent Garden. You went in at a front door and ahead of

you was a passage leading to the premises of Bellamy Bros., dealers in seeds and garden produce. Ignoring the Bros. Bellamy, you proceeded upstairs and found two doors opposite you. One, marked Private, opened into Sippy's editorial sanctum. The other—subtitle: Inquiries—shot you into a small room where an office-boy sat, eating peppermints and reading the adventures of Tarzan. If you got past the office-boy, you went through another door and there you were in Sippy's room, just as if you had nipped through the door marked Private. Perfectly simple.

It was over the door marked Inquiries that I proposed to suspend the flour.

Now, setting a booby-trap for a respectable citizen like a head master (even of an inferior school to your own) is not a matter to be approached lightly and without careful preparation. I don't suppose I've ever selected a lunch with more thought than I did that day. And after a nicely-balanced meal, preceded by a couple of dry Martinis, washed down with a half bot. of a nice light, dry champagne, and followed by a spot of brandy, I could have set a booby-trap for a bishop.

The only really difficult part of the campaign was to get rid of the office-boy; for naturally you don't want witnesses when you're shoving bags of flour on

doors. Fortunately, every man has his price, and it wasn't long before I contrived to persuade the lad that there was sickness at home and he was needed at Cricklewood. This done, I mounted a chair and got to work.

It was many, many years since I had tackled this kind of job, but the old skill came back as good as ever. Having got the bag so nicely poised that a touch on the door would do all that was necessary, I skipped down from my chair, popped off through Sippy's room, and went down into the street. Sippy had not shown up yet, which was all to the good, but I knew he usually trickled in at about five to three. I hung about in the street, and presently round the corner came the bloke Waterbury. He went in at the front door, and I started off for a short stroll. It was no part of my policy to be in the offing when things began to happen.

It seemed to me that, allowing for wind and weather, the scales should have fallen from old Sippy's eyes by about three-fifteen, Greenwich mean time; so, having prowled around Covent Garden among the spuds and cabbages for twenty minutes or so, I retraced my steps and pushed up the stairs. I went in at the door marked Private, fully expecting

to see old Sippy, and conceive of my astonishment and chagrin when I found on entering only the bloke Waterbury. He was seated at Sippy's desk, reading a paper, as if the place belonged to him.

And, moreover, there was of flour on his person not a trace.

"Great Scott!" I said.

It was a case of the sunken road, after all. But, dash it, how could I have been expected to take into consideration the possibility that this cove, head master though he was, would have had the cold nerve to walk into Sippy's private office instead of pushing in a normal and orderly manner through the public door?

He raised the nose, and focused me over it.

"Yes?"

"I was looking for old Sippy."

"Mr. Sipperley has not yet arrived."

He spoke with a good deal of pique, seeming to be a man who was not used to being kept waiting.

"Well, how is everything?" I said, to ease things along.

He had started reading again. He looked up as if he found me pretty superfluous.

"I beg your pardon?"

"Oh, nothing."

"You spoke."

“I only said ‘How is everything?’ don’t you know.”

“How is what?”

“Everything.”

“I fail to understand you.”

“Let it go,” I said.

I found a certain difficulty in boosting along the chitchat. He was not a responsive cove.

“Nice day,” I said.

“Quite.”

“But they say the crops need rain.”

He had buried himself in his paper once more, and seemed peeved this time on being lugged to the surface.

“What?”

“The crops.”

“The crops?”

“Crops.”

“What crops?”

“Oh, just crops.”

He laid down his paper.

“You appear to be desirous of giving me some information about crops. What is it?”

“I hear they need rain.”

“Indeed?”

That concluded the small-talk. He went on reading, and I found a chair and sat down and

sucked the handle of my stick. And so the long day wore on.

It may have been some two hours later, or it may have been about five minutes, when there became audible in the passage outside a strange wailing sound, as of some creature in pain. The bloke Waterbury looked up. I looked up.

The wailing came closer. It came into the room. It was Sippy, singing.

"—I love you. That's all that I can say. I love you, I lo-o-ve you. The same old—"

He suspended the chant, not too soon for me.

"Oh, hullo!" he said.

I was amazed. The last time I had seen old Sippy, you must remember, he had had all the appearance of a man who didn't know it was loaded. Haggard. Drawn face. Circles under the eyes. All that sort of thing. And now, not much more than twenty-four hours later, he was simply radiant. His eyes sparkled. His mobile lips were curved in a happy smile. He looked as if he had been taking as much as will cover a sixpence every morning before breakfast for years.

"Hullo, Bertie!" he said. "Hullo, Waterbury! Sorry I'm late."

The bloke Waterbury seemed by no means pleased at this cordial form of address. He froze visibly.

"You are exceedingly late. I may mention that I have been waiting for upwards of half an hour, and my time is not without its value."

"Sorry, sorry, sorry, sorry, sorry," said Sippy, jovially. "You wanted to see me about that article on the Elizabethan dramatists you left here yesterday, didn't you? Well, I've read it, and I'm sorry to say, Waterbury, that it's N.G."

"I beg your pardon?"

"No earthly use to us. Quite the wrong sort of stuff. This paper is supposed to be all light Society interest. What the débutante will wear for Goodwood, you know, and I saw Lady Betty Bootle in the Park yesterday—she is, of course, the sister-in-law of the Duchess of Peebles, 'Cuckoo' to her intimates—all that kind of rot. My readers don't want stuff about Elizabethan dramatists."

"Sipperley—!"

Old Sippy reached out and patted him in a paternal manner on the back.

"Now listen, Waterbury," he said, kindly. "You know as well as I do that I hate to turn down an old pal. But I have my duty to the paper. Still, don't be discouraged. Keep trying, and you'll do fine. There is

a lot of promise in your stuff, but you want to study your market. Keep your eyes open and see what editors need. Now, just as a suggestion, why not have a dash at a light, breezy article on pet dogs. You've probably noticed that the pug, once so fashionable, has been superseded by the Peke, the griffon, and the Sealyham. Work on that line and—"

The bloke Waterbury navigated towards the door.

"I have no desire to work on that line, as you put it," he said, stiffly. "If you do not require my paper on the Elizabethan dramatists I shall no doubt be able to find another editor whose tastes are more in accord with my work."

"The right spirit absolutely, Waterbury," said Sippy, cordially. "Never give in. Perseverance brings home the gravy. If you get an article accepted, send another article to that editor. If you get an article refused, send that article to another editor. Carry on, Waterbury. I shall watch your future progress with considerable interest."

"Thank you," said the bloke Waterbury, bitterly. "This expert advice should prove most useful."

He biffed off, banging the door behind him, and I turned to Sippy, who was swerving about the room like an exuberant snipe.

"Sippy—"

"Eh? What? Can't stop, Bertie, can't stop. Only looked in to tell you the news. I'm taking Gwendolen to tea at the Carlton. I'm the happiest man in the world, Bertie. Engaged, you know. Betrothed. All washed up and signed on the dotted line. Wedding, June the first, at eleven a.m. sharp, at St. Peter's, Eaton Square. Presents should be delivered before the end of May."

"But, Sippy! Come to roost for a second. How did this happen? I thought—"

"Well, it's a long story. Much too long to tell you now. Ask Jeeves. He came along with me, and is waiting outside. But when I found her bending over me, weeping, I knew that a word from me was all that was needed. I took her little hand in mine and —"

"What do you mean, bending over you? Where?"

"In your sitting-room."

"Why?"

"Why what?"

"Why was she bending over you?"

"Because I was on the floor, ass. Naturally a girl would bend over a fellow who was on the floor. Goodbye, Bertie. I must rush."

He was out of the room before I knew he had started. I followed at a high rate of speed, but he was down the stairs before I reached the passage. I

legged it after him, but when I got into the street it was empty.

No, not absolutely empty. Jeeves was standing on the pavement, gazing dreamily at a brussels sprout which lay in the fairway.

"Mr. Sipperley has this moment gone, sir," he said, as I came charging out.

I halted and mopped the brow.

"Jeeves," I said, "what has been happening?"

"As far as Mr. Sipperley's romance is concerned, sir, all, I am happy to report, is well. He and Miss Moon have arrived at a satisfactory settlement."

"I know. They're engaged. But how did it happen?"

"I took the liberty of telephoning to Mr. Sipperley in your name, asking him to come immediately to the flat, sir."

"Oh, that's how he came to be at the flat? Well?"

"I then took the liberty of telephoning to Miss Moon and informing her that Mr. Sipperley had met with a nasty accident. As I anticipated, the young lady was strongly moved and announced her intention of coming to see Mr. Sipperley immediately. When she arrived, it required only a few moments to arrange the matter. It seems that Miss Moon has long loved Mr. Sipperley, sir, and—"

"I should have thought that, when she turned up and found he hadn't had a nasty accident, she would have been thoroughly pipped at being fooled."

"Mr. Sipperley had had a nasty accident, sir."

"He had?"

"Yes, sir."

"Rummy coincidence. I mean, after what you were saying this morning."

"Not altogether, sir. Before telephoning to Miss Moon, I took the further liberty of striking Mr. Sipperley a sharp blow on the head with one of your golf-clubs, which was fortunately lying in a corner of the room. The putter, I believe, sir. If you recollect, you were practising with it this morning before you left."

I gaped at the blighter. I had always known Jeeves for a man of infinite sagacity, sound beyond belief on any question of ties or spats; but never before had I suspected him capable of strong-arm work like this. It seemed to open up an entirely new aspect of the fellow. I can't put it better than by saying that, as I gazed at him, the scales seemed to fall from my eyes.

"Good heavens, Jeeves!"

"I did it with the utmost regret, sir. It appeared to me the only course."

“But look here, Jeeves. I don’t get this. Wasn’t Mr. Sipperley pretty shirty when he came to and found that you had been soaking him with putters?”

“He was not aware that I had done so, sir. I took the precaution of waiting until his back was momentarily turned.”

“But how did you explain the bump on his head?”

“I informed him that your new vase had fallen on him, sir.”

“Why on earth would he believe that? The vase would have been smashed.”

“The vase was smashed, sir.”

“What!”

“In order to achieve verisimilitude, I was reluctantly compelled to break it, sir. And in my excitement, sir, I am sorry to say I broke it beyond repair.”

I drew myself up.

“Jeeves!” I said.

“Pardon me, sir, but would it not be wiser to wear a hat? There is a keen wind.”

I blinked.

“Aren’t I wearing a hat?”

“No, sir.”

I put up a hand and felt the lemon. He was perfectly right.

“Nor am I! I must have left it in Sippy’s office. Wait here, Jeeves, while I fetch it.”

“Very good, sir.”

“I have much to say to you.”

“Thank you, sir.”

I galloped up the stairs and dashed in at the door. And something squashy fell on my neck, and the next minute the whole world was a solid mass of flour. In the agitation of the moment I had gone in at the wrong door; and what it all boils down to is that, if any more of my pals get inferiority complexes, they can jolly well get rid of them for themselves. Bertram is through.

THE END

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P.G. WODEHOUSE

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